

inlitted to exist. *It* appears that the practice of keeping retainers was perfectly legal. Even those statutes of livery which were directed against its abuse, especially against private war and the maintenance of civil war in court, recognised the right of a lord to enlist men for war by indenture. The new laws were intended to prevent prelates and esquires from monopolising retainers, but this only amounted to creating a monopoly in favour of lords and knights.¹ In spite of all legislation, robbery, maintenance and the other evils of the system continued unchecked. It was in vain that the Commons induced the King to promise that, no man should ride fully armed through the country, but, that his lances be taken away and broken. Lord Neville rode at the head of twenty men-at-arms and twenty mounted archers arrayed in the Duke of Lancaster's livery.¹ He would have been a bold sheriff who offered to take away their lances and break them.

The reason of the helplessness of the government to enforce the law is not far to seek. The King was powerless to act against the great nobles, because his only military resources were the resources commanded by the nobles themselves. His army consisted, not of Life Guards and regiments of the Line, but of numerous small bands of archers and men-at-arms belonging to earls, dukes, knights, and professional soldiers of fortune, hired by the government for a greater or less time. Such troops might do well for the French war, and might rally round the throne on an occasion like the Peasants' Rising, when all the upper classes were threatened by a common danger. But they could scarcely be used to suppress themselves, or to hang the employers whose badges they wore on their coats, and whose pay jingled in their pockets. Once indeed, in 1378, the Commons insisted that a special commission should be sent into the country to restore order. But the new body was necessarily composed of great lords and their retainers, who were soon found to be even more intolerable than the law-breakers whom they were sent to suppress. The Commons next year asked that the?

» *State, of France, 13 E. II. 8, and 1 B. II. 4, 7.* « *Motus Parliamenti 134-*